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SUBJECT: BOLIVIA STEPS UP ANTI-U.S. RHETORIC

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State, La Paz; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: The Bolivian government has sharply intensified its anti-American rhetoric in the days leading up to President Evo Morales's January 22 inauguration, revisiting perceived grievances, asserting that Bolivia is better off for having expelled the U.S. ambassador and DEA, providing a platform for left-wing critics and conspiracy theorists, and joining an ALBA-led campaign attacking U.S. relief efforts in Haiti. This escalation in attacks does not appear linked to any internal crisis but may represent an effort by Morales and his government to burnish their anti-imperialist leadership credentials at the outset of their second term. We have no direct evidence of GOB plans, but are concerned that this course could result in precipitant action against the U.S. presence in Bolivia early in the new administration. End summary.

12. (SBU) Since his re-election December 6, Morales has been increasingly expansive in his attacks on the U.S. "empire," in contrast to the relative restraint he demonstrated during the electoral campaign. Energized by his sweeping victory at home and by his prominent role in anti-imperialist, anti-globalization diatribes at the Havana ALBA and Copenhagen climate change summits in mid-December, Morales no longer tempers his observations about alleged U.S. designs on Latin America and has grown ever more critical of President Obama personally.

13. (SBU) In an interview January 17 with the government-controlled daily "Cambio," Morales recalled his long, adversarial relationship with the United States before becoming president, gleefully maintaining that alleged U.S. efforts against him had backfired and actually strengthened his position. Morales railed against the U.S. for warning him against closer ties with Iran and Venezuela, accusing us of interference in Bolivia's foreign relations while at the same time "conspiring" with the domestic opposition. He declared himself proud of having expelled Ambassador Goldberg in September 2008 and DEA a few months later, suggesting that the Bolivian opposition was left "without direction" as a result. Morales also charged the U.S. with becoming the "garbage bin for delinquents," serving as a place of refuge for former President Sanchez de Lozada and, most recently, former opposition candidate Manfred Reyes Villa. President Obama says he wants relations based on mutual respect, Morales said, but instead he "installs military bases and sends troops abroad to kill." Morales characterized the U.S. "invasion" of Haiti as "inhumane, savage and opportunistic."

14. (SBU) Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera, an unresconstructed Marxist and vociferous critic of the United States, has seized

every opportunity in recent weeks to attack the U.S. and reiterate his view of us as the principal threat -- political, economic and military -- to Latin America. Returning from a brief aid visit to Port-au-Prince (facilitated by the USG, despite the GOB's likely hope that his plane would be diverted and provide Garcia Linera with a propaganda coup), he echoed the ALBA line that the U.S. is using the crisis to establish a military base in Haiti and is providing little humanitarian aid. The U.S. presence in Haiti represents an "aggression toward Bolivia and all of Latin America," he declared. On January 20, President Morales repeated his demand for end to the "military occupation" of Haiti and called for an emergency session of the UN Security Council to take up the matter.

15. (SBU) The GOB's attacks have been echoed and amplified in the government mouthpiece, "Cambio," which has featured an anti-U.S.-themed editorial nearly every day in the past few weeks. In addition to regular commentary denouncing U.S. actions in Haiti, "Cambio" has underscored the Morales government's charges of U.S. plotting in Bolivia and its conclusion that the country is better off for having expelled U.S. officials and defied the imperialists. "Cambio" has also given free rein in its pages to a host of left-wing critics, many non-Bolivian, providing commentary accusing the U.S. of "blackmail" in not extending ATPA benefits to Bolivia, detailing alleged U.S. abuses in Iraq and Afghanistan, and charging President Obama with not being a "real" black man. Just for good measure, "Cambio" two weeks ago gave coverage to a 9/11 conspiracy theorist (who alleged that the Twin Towers were destroyed using explosive charges, possibly by the U.S. military).

16. (C) Comment: The current atmosphere, just days ahead of Morales's inauguration, is reminiscent of the campaign launched

against the U.S. prior to Ambassador Goldberg's expulsion. Today, there is no ongoing domestic crisis to which to connect us (or from which the GOB needs to divert the public's attention) and so far the embassy itself has not come under fire. On Haiti, Bolivia is clearly following a coordinated ALBA script. Nevertheless, the intensity of the GOB's recent anti-American rhetoric and Morales's possible regional leadership ambitions could portend a sustained, harder line against us, including -- although we have no direct evidence of such plans -- action aimed at the U.S. presence in the country.
Creamer